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# Demographic statistics

## Report of the Secretary-General

*Summary*

The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2018/227 and past practices, presents activities carried out by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in the area of demographic statistics. It provides a summary of the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme during the past year, with a focus on contemporary methods of conducting population and housing censuses, including real-time and conventional editing of census records for the current population and housing census round. It provides information on activities relating to the promotion of the revised set of international statistical standards for civil registration and vital statistics and the development of handbooks on the legal framework and communication for the development of civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems. It also provides information on the collection of demographic statistics through the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires and summary information on an expert group meeting on the use of contemporary methodology for the delineation of urban and rural areas. In addition, it provides an update on the development and related activities of the Titchfield Group on ageing-related statistics and age-disaggregated data, which was established at the forty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission.

The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

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# I. Introduction

1. The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2018/227 and past practices, presents activities carried out by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in the area of demographic statistics.

# II. 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme

2. The 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme was approved by the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session and endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2015/10. The Programme serves as acknowledgement that population and housing censuses are among the main sources of data for effective development planning and objective decision-making, in particular in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Programme is aimed at ensuring that each Member State conducts a population and housing census at least once during the 2015–2024 period and disseminates the resulting census statistics on population and housing in as comprehensive and holistic a manner as possible.

3. In that context, the Division undertook the process of revising and updating the major international statistical standard for population and housing censuses, the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, and the third revision of that set of recommendations was adopted by the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session.

4. Building on those principles and recommendations, as well as on the revised *Handbook on the Management of Population and Housing Censuses*, the completion of which was reported to the Statistical Commission at its forty-eighth session, the Division organized and conducted, with the support of the World Bank and the United Nations Population Fund, three workshops on the theme "2020 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses: international standards and contemporary technologies", held in Tbilisi in April 2018; in Colombo in May 2018; and in Kuala Lumpur in June 2018, with the participation of 30 Asian countries and 70 census managers and senior census methodologists.

5. Furthermore, the Division provided direct technical assistance to national statistical authorities in supporting the conduct of their respective population and housing censuses based on internationally agreed standards and methods. Such in-house training was provided to the national statistical authorities in the State of Palestine in December 2017 and Cameroon in November 2018, in line with their specific needs and with regard to the planning and implementation of their respective 2020 rounds of population and housing censuses.

6. Taking into consideration that the 2020 round of population and housing censuses (2015–2024) will be substantially different in terms of the role of contemporary technologies, primarily the use of tablet computers and self-enumeration using the Internet, the Division, in close coordination with the regional commissions of the United Nations and with the support of national statistical offices that used those technologies in their censuses, finalized the initial version of the *Guidelines on the Use of Electronic Data Collection Technologies in Population and Housing Censuses*.[1] The *Guidelines* have been designed as a live online document

[1] Available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/standmeth/handbooks/guideline-edct-census-v1.pdf.

that will be updated with national experiences and further elaborated as they become available throughout the 2020 census round.

7. In January 2019, during the process of completing the methodological framework for the 2020 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses, the Division conducted a meeting to review the draft second revision of the *Handbook on Population and Housing Census Editing*. The *Handbook* elaborates on procedures and specifications for conventional census editing after the collection of census data, as well as on real-time editing, in which tablet computers and similar technology are used for data collection.

8. The Division, together with the United Nations Population Fund, the United States Census Bureau and the World Bank, is coordinating activities relating to population and housing censuses through the International Committee on Census Coordination, which meets at least twice a year.

9. The Division will, as in previous rounds, organize workshops to promote the revised principles, recommendations and other methodological materials, targeting all regions. Detailed schedules, subject matter and information on participating countries and partners will be posted regularly on the website of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme.

## III. Implementation of the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*

10. On the basis of the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*, endorsed by the Statistical Commission at its forty-fifth session, and *the Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Management, Operation and Maintenance, Revision 1*, whose completion was announced to the Commission at its forty-eighth session, the Division, with the close cooperation and support of the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean of the World Health Organization, designed and conducted regional workshops to introduce and promote the revised set of international standards and the operations of civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems. The workshops were held in Casablanca, Morocco, and Tunis in March 2018, with the participation of 20 countries and 69 statisticians, civil registrars and public health professionals. The workshops introduced a newly developed curriculum intended to provide training to statisticians, civil registrars, public health officers and identity management professionals in the development of a holistic model for ensuring interoperability between the registration of vital events, the production of regular and reliable vital statistics, and identity management systems.

11. The Division conducted, with the close cooperation and support of the non-governmental organization Vital Strategies, an expert group meeting in December 2018 on the draft revision of the *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Preparation of the Legal Framework*, published in 1998, entitled *Guidelines on the Legislative Framework for Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management*. A report on the meeting and the finalized *Guidelines* will be available as background documents.

12. The Division is organizing, with the close cooperation and support of the Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, an expert group meeting on the draft revision of the *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Developing Information, Education and Communication*, published in 1998, entitled *Handbook on Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems: Communication for Development*. The revision will

take into consideration contemporary methods and techniques relating to communication and education with regard to the necessity of registering vital events, translating them into comprehensive, regular, small area vital statistics and ensuring a legal identity for all.

13. The Division continues to serve as the secretariat for the Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Group and maintains its website, which provides information on the activities of all members of the Group relating to the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics. The Group has elaborated on various projects and programmes carried out by members of the group, ensuring a coordinated approach and the use of international standards and recommendations.

14. In September 2018, at the request of the Deputy Secretary-General, the Division was designated co-chair, together with the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund, of the United Nations Legal Identity Expert Group, which brings together 15 entities, including regional commissions. The main objective of the Expert Group is to provide advice and a unified United Nations position with regard to the definition of legal identity in the context of a holistic model for civil registration, vital statistics and identity management.

## IV. Collection of statistics through the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires

15. The Division collects, compiles and disseminates annually official demographic and social statistics for all countries and areas of the world. The data are collected through a set of annual and census questionnaires dispatched to the national statistical offices. The data collected refer to population distribution and composition by several characteristics, including the population of cities and urban agglomerations, fertility, mortality, nuptiality, annual migration flows, migrant stock according to the population censuses, household characteristics, housing characteristics, economic characteristics and levels of education. The traditional form of dissemination is the *Demographic Yearbook* collection, published annually since 1948.[2]

16. The following overview represents an update of the report submitted to the Statistical Commission at its forty-ninth session (E/CN.3/2018/21) and is focused on the availability of vital statistics collected from the national statistical offices, which is defined as the main data sets available for each vital event published in the *Demographic Yearbook 2017*, the latest published edition.[3] The annex to the present report contains a table indicating the availability of each listed data set in terms of the number of countries or areas that submitted data published in the *Demographic Yearbook 2017* as a percentage of the total number of countries or areas of the world.

17. Broadly speaking, the availability of vital statistics, by topic, is as follows: live births by urban or rural residence, 70 per cent; deaths by urban or rural residence, 68 per cent; live births by age of mother and sex of child, and deaths by age and sex, 62 and 61 per cent, respectively; marriages by urban or rural residence, 57 per cent; marriages by age of groom and by age of bride, 45 per cent; infant deaths by urban or rural residence, 55 per cent; infant deaths by age and sex, 44 per cent; divorces by urban or rural residence, 49 per cent; late fetal deaths by urban or rural residence,

[2] Editions of the *Demographic Yearbook* are available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/products/dyb/index.cshtml. Demographic data, in particular population and housing census data, are published incrementally online to the UNdata portal at http://data.un.org/.

[3] At the time of reporting (December 2018). By the time the present report is submitted to the Statistical Commission, in March 2019, the *Demographic Yearbook 2017* will be available.

38 per cent; live births by age of father, 37 per cent; legally induced abortions, 26 per cent; and legally induced abortions by age of woman, 21 per cent.

18. Some three quarters of the countries or areas of the world have submitted to the United Nations overall statistics on total births and deaths. The share decreases, however, with the introduction of additional variables, such as age, and with respect to other units of vital statistics enumeration, such as fetal deaths.

## V. Activities relating to a methodology for the delineation of urban and rural areas

19. In accordance with decision 49/112 (j) of the Statistical Commission (see E/2018/24), the Division undertook activities relating to assessing a methodology for the delineation of urban and rural areas for purposes of international statistical comparison. This particular methodology for devising a harmonized definition of cities and rural areas based on the degree of urbanization and the definition of a functional urban area has been developed by the European Commission, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and the World Bank.

20. In December 2017, the Division launched a pilot survey – 15 countries from all regions of the world participated – soliciting input from national statistical authorities regarding the implementation and feasibility of the proposed methodology in their national circumstances. The results were presented at a side event of the forty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission, in March 2018, and the conclusion was reached that further discussion and assessment were necessary.

21. Subsequently, the Division, with the cooperation and full support of the European Commission, conducted an expert group meeting, to be held in New York from 28 to 30 January 2019, on the statistical methodology for delineating cities and rural areas. The conclusions and recommendations of the meeting will be available as background documents. The full report and recommendations with respect to endorsing the methodology for the purpose of ensuring international statistical comparability only – while not affecting or having an impact on national definitions of cities, townships and urban and rural areas – will be submitted to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-first session.

## VI. Activities of the Titchfield Group on ageing-related statistics and age-disaggregated data

22. At its forty-ninth session, the Statistical Commission, in its decision 49/118 (E/2018/24), established the Titchfield Group on ageing-related statistics and age-disaggregated data and endorsed its proposed terms of reference. The Commission encouraged the Titchfield Group to work in close consultation with other existing mechanisms on data disaggregation.

23. During the past year, with the Office of National Statistics of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at the lead, the Titchfield Group has developed the terms of reference for its Steering Group. As part of that work, the role of the Steering Group and of the national statistical office taking the lead in tackling specific areas of work have been developed. The main areas of work are focused on an assessment of the current evidence; horizon scanning to anticipate future needs; a conceptual and analytical framework; ensuring alignment with the Sustainable

Development Goals and with other groups; standardization and harmonization; and a platform for sharing information.

24. Encouraging more active participation from the national statistical offices, including by leading the areas of work, is of particular importance in terms of achieving the goals of the Titchfield Group. Consequently, a strategy has been developed to promote the Group at international events relating to disaggregation and ageing, such as at the meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, held in Sweden from 5 to 8 November 2018, and the South-South Conference on Demography and Population Ageing meeting, held in Malaysia on 4 and 5 December 2018.

25. The first formal technical meeting of the Titchfield Group was held in Chichester, United Kingdom, on 26 and 27 June 2018. The main objectives of the meeting were to identify and refine the areas of work, deliverables and scope of work. More than 60 representatives of 30 national statistical offices and 17 other institutions, including civil society, academia and United Nations entities, attended the meeting.[4]

26. The second technical meeting of the Titchfield Group is scheduled for June 2019. The national statistics office of the Republic of Korea, Statistics Korea, has offered to host the meeting. The main objectives of the meeting will be finalized by the Steering Group in early 2019; they are likely to include a review of progress thus far, the sharing of case study examples of where data on older ages have been improved and the further refinement of deliverables for the second and third years.

27. The paper prepared by the Office of National Statistics of the United Kingdom on the Titchfield Group is available as a background document.

[4] See https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/events/first-official-meeting-of-the-titchfield-city-group-on-ageing-and-age-disaggregated-data.

# Annex

## Availability of vital statistics

| | *Countries or areas* | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Number* | *Percentage* |
| **Fertility** | | |
| Live births by urban or rural residence | 166 | 70 |
| Live births by age of mother and sex of child | 148 | 62 |
| Live births by age of father | 87 | 37 |
| **Fetal mortality** | | |
| Late fetal deaths by urban or rural residence | 91 | 38 |
| Legally induced abortions | 62 | 26 |
| Legally induced abortions by age of woman | 51 | 21 |
| **Infant mortality** | | |
| Infant deaths by urban or rural residence | 130 | 55 |
| Infant deaths by age and sex | 105 | 44 |
| **General mortality** | | |
| Deaths by urban or rural residence | 163 | 68 |
| Deaths by age and sex | 146 | 61 |
| **Nuptiality and divorce** | | |
| Marriages by urban or rural residence | 135 | 57 |
| Marriages by age of groom and by age of bride | 108 | 45 |
| Divorces by urban or rural residence | 116 | 49 |

*Source*: *Demographic Yearbook 2017*.